IDENTITY, COMMUNITIES AND TECHNOLOGY
ON THE CUSP OF CHANGE

2009 McNair Scholars Online Journal
The Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program at Portland State University (PSU) works with motivated and talented undergraduates who want to pursue PhDs. It introduces juniors and seniors who are first-generation and low-income, and/or members of under-represented groups to academic research and to effective strategies for getting into and graduating from PhD programs.

The McNair Scholars Program has academic-year activities and a full-time summer research internship. Scholars take academic and skills-building seminars and workshops during the year, and each scholar works closely with a faculty mentor on original research in the summer. Scholars present their research findings at the McNair Summer Symposium and at other conferences, and are encouraged to publish their papers in the McNair Journal and other scholarly publications.

The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program was established in 1986 by the U.S. Department of Education and named in honor of Challenger Space Shuttle astronaut Dr. Ronald E. McNair. The program, which is in its seventh year on campus, is funded by a $924,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education and institutional cost-share funds.

The McNair Scholars Program’s student-centered approach relies heavily on faculty and university commitment. Activities and opportunities provided by the program focus on building a positive academic community for the scholars while they are undergraduates at PSU.
Ronald E. McNair

Ronald Erwin McNair was born October 21, 1950 in Lake City, South Carolina. While in junior high school, Dr. McNair was inspired to work hard and persevere in his studies by his family and by a teacher who recognized his scientific potential and believed in him. Dr. McNair graduated as valedictorian from Carver High School in 1967. In 1971, he graduated magna cum laude and received a bachelor of science degree in Physics from North Carolina A&T State University (Greensboro). Dr. McNair then enrolled in the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1976, at the age of 26, he earned his Ph.D. in laser physics. His dissertation was titled, “Energy Absorption and Vibrational Heating in Molecules Following Intense Laser Excitation.” Dr. McNair was presented an honorary doctorate of Laws from North Carolina A&T State University in 1978, an honorary doctorate of Science from Morris College in 1980, and an honorary doctorate of science from the University of South Carolina in 1984.

While working as a staff physicist with Hughes Research Laboratory, Dr. McNair soon became a recognized expert in laser physics. His many distinctions include being a Presidential Scholar (1971-74), a Ford Foundation Fellow (1971-74), a National Fellowship Fund Fellow (1974-75), and a NATO Fellow (1975). He was also a sixth degree black belt in karate and an accomplished saxophonist. Because of his many accomplishments, he was selected by NASA for the space shuttle program in 1978. His first space shuttle mission launched successfully from Kennedy Space Center on February 3, 1984. Dr. Ronald E. McNair was the second African American to fly in space. Two years later he was selected to serve as mission specialist aboard the ill-fated U.S. Challenger space shuttle. He was killed instantly when the Challenger exploded one minute, thirteen seconds after it was launched. Dr. McNair was posthumously awarded the Congressional Space Medal of Honor. After his death in the Challenger Space Shuttle accident on January 28, 1986, members of Congress provided funding for the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. Their goal was to encourage low-income and first-generation college students, and students from historically underrepresented ethnic groups to expand their educational opportunities by enrolling in a Ph.D. program and ultimately pursue an academic career. This program is dedicated to the high standards of achievement inspired by Dr. McNair’s life.

Source: mcnairscholars.com
Table of Contents

The Portland State Scholars

Editorial Board

Duality and the Importance of Canadian Humour in *A Complicated Kindness*
Mandy Barberree
Marie Lo, Faculty Mentor

Victor-Lévy Beaulieu and Québec's Linguistic and Cultural Identity Struggle
Anne Marie Brown
Jennifer Perlmutter, Faculty Mentor

Portland's Artisan Economy: The Arts and Crafts Sector
Melissa Cannon
Charles Heying, Faculty Mentor

The Relationship of Acculturation and All Cause Mortality Among Mexican Americans: Results from the NHANES III Mortality Follow Up
Gloria Diaz
Carlos Crespo, Faculty Mentor

Shock Effects in CML-0175: The "Wow" Stone
Kristy Hauver
Alexander M. Ruzicka, Faculty Mentor

Time after Time: Exploring Temporality and Identity in Wong Kar-Wai's *Days of Being Wild, In the Mood for Love, and 2046*
Julie Nakama
Mark Berrettini, Faculty Mentor

Corn, Free Trade, and the Mexican Quest for Food Security
Jazmine Ogle
Leopoldo Rodriguez, Faculty Mentor

Nonstandard PL Embeddings in Codimension Two
Roy Sharp
Marion "Paul" Latiolais, Faculty Mentor

An Bó Bheannaithe: Cattle Symbolism in Traditional Irish Folklore, Myth, and Archaeology
Amy Sherwood
Cameron Smith, Faculty Mentor

Oviposition site choice in a Neotropical tree frog, Dendropsophus ebraccatus
Julie Worley
Sarah Eppley, Faculty Mentor
The Portland State Scholars

Mandy Barberree
Project Title: Duality and the Importance of Canadian Humour in *A Complicated Kindness*
Faculty Mentor: Marie Lo

Anna Marie Brown
Project Title: Victor-Lévy Beaulieu and Québec's Linguistic and Cultural Identity Struggle
Faculty Mentor: Jennifer Perlmutter

Melissa Cannon
Project Title: Portland's Artisan Economy: The Arts and Crafts Sector
Faculty Mentor: Charles Heying

Gloria Diaz
Project Title: The Relationship of Acculturation and All Cause Mortality Among Mexican Americans: Results from the NHANES III Mortality Follow Up
Faculty Mentor: Carlos Crespo

Kristy Hauver
Project Title: Shock Effects in CML-0175: The "Wow" Stone
Faculty Mentor: Alexander M. Ruzicka

Kristian Hochreiter
Project Title: Developing an Instrument to Measure Incoming Freshmen's Understanding of 'How the University Works'
Faculty Mentor: Peter Collier

Lanel Jackson
Project Title: HIV/AIDS Prevention: Examining the Behavioral Aspects of INfection and Transmission among women in North and Northeast Portland: A Pilot Study in Multnomah County, Oregon
Faculty Mentor: Lynette Feder

Marianna Lomanto
Project Title: The Impact of Child Reunification on Female Offenders and Recidivism
Faculty Mentor: Melissa Thompson

Kelly Marvin
Project Title: Investigation of Cofactor Specificity in Biological Nitrile Reduction
Faculty Mentor: Dirk Iwata-Reuyl

Jennifer Maynard
Project Title: Trauma and Resiliency: The Issue of Culturally Appropriate Measures from a Kaska Perspective
Faculty Mentor: Lynette Feder
Julie Mertes
Project title: Phenomenological Interviews with Returning Women Students
Faculty Mentor: Carol Morgaine

Julie Nakama
Project Title: Time after Time, Investigating Identity in Wong Kar-wai’s *Days of Being Wild, In the Mood for Love, and 2046*
Faculty Mentor: Mark Berrettini

Jazmin Ogle
Project Title: Corn, Free Trade, and the Mexican Quest for Development
Faculty Mentor: Leopoldo Rodriguez

Yolanda Paris
Project Title: Root Causes: The Role of Racism in Perpetuating Health Disparities among African American Communities--- A Pilot Study in Multnomah County, Oregon
Faculty Mentor: Debra Harris

Treasure Porth
Project Title: Homosexual Anxiety and Portrayals of the Male Relationship on Popular Television
Faculty Mentor: Michael Ward

Kristin Ragsdale
Project Title: Presentation Format and Earnings Management through Available-for-Sale Securities: A Review of the Literature
Faculty Mentor: Elizabeth Dreike Almer & Kristi Yuthas

Roy Sharp
Project Title: Nonstandard PL Embeddings in Codimension Two
Faculty Mentor: Marion "Paul" Latiolais

Amy Elizabeth Sherwood
Project title: An Bó Bheannaithe: The Archaeological Origins of Cattle Symbolism in Traditional Irish Folklore and Myth
Faculty Mentor: Cameron McPherson Smith

Robyn Stowers
Project Title: Oregon’s Opinion on Prisoner Rehabilitation and Reentry Policy
Faculty Mentor: Richard Clucas

Matthew Thomas
Project Title: The Theoretical Modeling of the Sink Depth of Trolled Fishing Lines
Faculty Mentor: Graig Spolek

Christopher Torres
Project Title: Physical Activity, Body Weight and the Link to All-Cause Mortality: A View from National Health Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES III, 1988-1994)
Faculty Mentor: Carlos Crespo
Julie Vuong
Project Title: Exploring the Reactions of Second Generation Vietnamese Americans of High- and Low- Educational Attainment to the Model-Minority Stereotype
Faculty Mentor: Sharon Carstens & Veronica Dujon

Shannon White
Project Title: Inside Oregon Public Broadcasting
Faculty Mentor: Priya Kapoor

Julie Worley
Project Title: Oviposition Site Choice in a Neotropical Tree Frog, Dendropsophus Ebraccatus
Faculty Mentor: Sarah Eppley

Lee Ann Wychoff
Project Title: The Under-representation of Minority Students in Post-Graduate Study: The Intersection of Race and Class in Rates of Enrollment
Faculty Mentor: Tom Chenoweth

Sarah Flaningam, Junior Scholar
Faculty Mentor: Dr. M. Barry Messer
Editorial Board

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